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ABSTRACT

Adding distance education would provide Andover College with unlimited growth and potentially increased revenue. Andover has three groups of students: nontraditional evening students aged 25-59 who want a degree to advance in their careers; traditional students aged 17-24; and certificate candidates. A distance program would make classes more available and allow students to complete degrees or certificates in a guaranteed amount of time. To recapture some of the market it has lost to its three competitors, Andover needs to be the first to offer a distance education program. Its major advantages are its six starts and program length. Distance education would enable Andover to market an "accelerated program." Although the competition is less expensive, Andover could easily rebut by selling a faster and more convenient degree program. To add a distance program, Andover would have to add to the main server, and the information technology department would have to design a system to support the influx of online participants and add staff. Strict controls would be needed, such as a password program, creation of a distance education department, and faculty trained to identify security and identification problems. The benefits of distance education outweigh the alternatives for Andover College. (YLB)

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Should Andover College Add a Distance Education Program?

By

Amanda L. Woodbury

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LITERATURE REVIEW

According to the Us Department of Education distance education grew to over 70% in 1997 and 1998 (Distance Education p.1). A 1999 report by Nando.net stated "798 schools held online courses." "Five of every eleven students attending U.S. Colleges are 25 or older and in this decade students 35 and older will exceed the number of traditional students (18-19 yrs)" (p.1). "As the costs of computers and other electronic devices decreases, more non-traditional students will be able to take advantage of these courses" (Distance Learning).

A study by the University of Idaho posed the question "is distance education effective?" "Research comparing distance education to traditional face-to-face instruction indicates that teaching and studying at a distance can be as effective as traditional instruction" (Distance education). Its can only be successful when "the method and technologies used are appropriate to the instructional tasks" (p. 1). The same study reports that there does have to be "student-to-student interaction and timely teacher-to-student feedback" (p. 1). There are many reasons that there has been an increase in distance education. "Distance education can eliminate travel and scheduling constraints and increase access to higher education" (Distance Learning).

When Brian Mueller (director of University Phoenix) was asked, "how does the online program relate to the classroom program, he responded that it was an exact replication" (Neal, 2002, p. 1). "We had developed a learning model that enhanced the ability of working adult students to learn." "We took that model and we put it into an online electronic classroom environment in an almost identical form" (p. 1).

Should Andover College Add a Distance Education Program?

Distance education would be a new and exciting venture for Andover College. The idea behind DE was developed as a result of stagnant growth and changing technology. This new expansion will provide the college with unlimited growth and potentially increase revenue by millions of dollars.

Andover College's Philosophy states "the college offers an open admissions policy in the belief that everyone has the right to pursue higher education and that we can provide a learning experience that empowers and inspires students to achieve their goals." In this fast paced world full of hectic schedules and extended employment hour's distance education is the future. Distance education will fulfill Andover's philosophy and provide an unlimited amount of potential students with the opportunity of an affordable higher education.

Lee Jenkins acquired Andover College in 1974. Over the next twenty years the school has outgrown several locations and developed both day and evening programs. The institution was not initially recognized as a college because they strictly focused on associate business programs and lacked regional accreditation. In 1998 the Board of Directors lead by President Berry led the institution to the long awaited regional accreditation. Since that time Andover has developed several new majors, which increased enrolment for the moment but the most resent data is indicating a steady decline.

Like all colleges Andover experiences cyclical enrollment. The main difference between this college and its competitors is that it has six starts a year. September and

January have had the largest enrollments while the other four starts have been unpredictable. Over the last year we have began to experience a decline in admissions. We believe it is due in part to the recent terrorists events but more important the lack of technological advances and the lack of new majors.

Primarily we have three groups of students. The "non-traditional" evening students, who are 25-59 years old, want a degree to advance in their career. They are homemakers, and/or individuals looking to fulfill a personal goal. Non-traditional students look for open admissions, lower cost, and do not have a lot of time to invest in their education. They usually have full time jobs and only able to spare two nights a week.

The admissions department states to all evening students that they could earn their degree in as little as twenty-two months. There have been several occurrences where the students get to their final two classes and they are told that those classes are not being offered. Some of these "non-traditional" students are only able to attend the second period class (part-time) and as a result it takes them three years to complete their degree. Distance education would give these students a chance to spend less time away from their families and help maintain our guarantee of 22 months.

The next group is referred to as "traditional." They are a younger generation (17-24 years old). They are unique because they are looking to attain their degree in 16 months. That guarantee is only applicable if the student does not break their program (taking vacations, failing a class, or taking less than the required case load). Distance education would allow the more "traditional" student to attend full time and continue to work or participate in an internship. It would also act as an alternative for this group of

students if a particular class were not offered to ensure they would complete their program in 16 months.

Distance education would make the largest difference to our third group of students. These are the certificate candidates. Students who already have a degree are eligible for our certificate programs. The glitch to this program is that the prospect is lead to believe they will complete their degree in a year. That may occur in a perfect world however, most certificate majors at Andover College attend longer that the evening students. Distance education would again alleviate that situation by providing the students an opportunity to adjust their schedules and enroll in any classes that are not frequently held at the physical location.

Our target market lives on a very limited budget. Many of them have extremely hectic schedules that have restricted them from earning an education in the first place. A distance education program would appeal to both our current population and future prospects because it is both affordable and more convenient.

Andover College has only a few close competitors. They are Southern Maine Technical College (SMTC), Central Maine Technical College (CMTC), and Mid State College. Each of these competitors has their own specific market however, they do overlap in several areas. SMTC is well known for its drafting and culinary arts but is also well known for their criminal justice program, which Andover too offers. Mid State and CMTC too duplicate several of Andover's majors and controls the competition because all three are less expensive and have more up-dated equipment. In order for Andover to recapture the market they need to jump ahead of the competition and be the first to offer a distance education program.

The major advantages Andover has on all three schools are its six starts and the length of its programs. Distance education would only enhance those benefits so that Andover could more easily market "accelerated program." Although the competition is less expensive Andover could easily rebut by selling a faster and more convenient degree program. They could also place strong emphasis on the importance of family time and current employment opportunities.

Distance education is expected to boom in the future. According to DE online report a third of the Universities are offering online courses. Even larger Universities such as Harvard, Berkeley, and NYU are working toward offering full-accredited online degrees. The report also indicates that the education market earns a $772 billion dollars in the United States and internationally the education market is worth $2.1 trillion (Online distance). As technology changes that number could go even higher. The next step for Andover College to take is to tap into the borderless virtual classroom and "provide a learning experience that empowers and inspires students to achieve their goals."

The addition of a distance program would not be difficult. Andover would have some initial start up costs, few faculty additions, and minor physical renovations. The first addition would have to be to the main server. The IT department will have to design a system that will support the influx of online participants. They will also have to increase their department form two associates to include facilitators (bridge person between students and staff), support staff (aid with registration, textbook orders, scheduling, and staff), faculty (instructors), and administrators (decision makers, consensus builders, and referees). Other changes will include the addition of 2-4 faculty

members, developing and preparing the courses, and operating and maintenance costs (Gottschalk, T).

This information was conduct on the current enrollment of two hundred students and keeping with current class size (Online distance).

Class size		25
Students per faculty	six starts	25 x 6 = 150
Number of faculty per start	two full time	2(200/150)
Cost of faculty ($30,000 each)	current starting salary	$60,000
35% fringe benefits	current rate	$21,000
Total faculty cost		$81,000

Start up costs	evaluated on five yrs Of teaching costs	$30,000 x 5 = $150,000
Technical cost for online		$50,000
Total Costs		$281,000
Total cost per course $600 per class	$600 x 6 x 200 x 2	$1,440,000

Distance education will soon be the way of the future. To ensure its success and the success of the students strict controls will have to be in place. The first recommendation will be a password program that will identify the student. This will only be released three days prior to the start of the course. The class syllabi will not be made available to the participants until the first day of class.

The next control will be to create a distance education department that will oversee the maintenance and progress of the blackboard. These professionals will undergo several months of training to ensure their qualifications. The department should be available Monday through Saturday (via phone and e-mail) during business hours and two trained individuals will be hired to monitor e-mail questions and provide a quick response times.

Faculty will too be recommended to get training so they too can identify any security and identification problems. They will receive a roster with the names, e-mail, and passwords of all students participating in the class. It will be advised that professors monitor blackboard conversations daily and too play an interactive role. Although the faculty will have some say about their curriculum a general guide of suggestions will be provided. The guide will include time testing methods, final exam substitute, and ways to enhance the quality of blackboard postings.

Finally the board of directors will maintain the last method of control. They will take a distance role to ensure that all federal regulations and accreditation policies are followed. All members will attend monthly meetings and receive daily reports from both the faculty and IT personnel. They too will be responsible for giving final approval for any and all major decisions.

Distance education is a huge risk for Andover College. As this report indicates the benefits out weigh the alternatives. Stagnant growth and a lack of innovation will only continue to cause a decline in enrollment and possibly lead to the sale of Andover College. The way to future success for Andover College is by jumping on the information highway and traveling the path to distance education.

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